



Nov. 7, 2024

Dear AFTNJ brothers and sisters:

As I began to process the outcome of the 2024 presidential election Wednesday morning, I found myself drawn to the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

What matters to us are the students and families we serve. As AFT President Randi Weingarten said [in her statement](#), “We must fight for the means and agency to secure a better life, and that public education and a growing labor movement are more important than ever. ... [We] will be doing everything [we] can to make a difference in the lives of people [we] serve. And our guiding principle will be to continue to do the work to improve people’s lives ... and the promise of America.”

But how do we go about doing that? For me, focusing on the things I do have control over — i.e., the things I can change — during difficult and challenging times helps me to keep from feeling overwhelmed and powerless. Because addressing every issue that may possibly happen over the next four years would be an ineffective strategy.

I have been also reading [an article that a friend sent me](#) that is helping me stay focused on what I can do moving forward. The author, Daniel Hunter, focuses on how “to avoid perpetuating the autocrat’s goals of fear, isolation, exhaustion and disorientation.” Hunter cites Timothy Snyder, the author of “On Tyranny,” who writes: “Most of the power of authoritarianism is freely given. In times like these, individuals think ahead about what a more repressive government will want, and then offer themselves without being asked. A citizen who adapts in this way is teaching power what it can do.” In other words, don’t cede your voice in the political space.

As we move forward into uncharted territory for our country, let’s stay focused on what we can do to improve the lives of our friends, families and the communities we serve. Let us not stay silent on the things that matter.

In solidarity,

Jennifer S. Higgins  
President, AFT New Jersey